

OVER 35 AND STILL SINGLE? ;
SO WHAT!

BYLINE: Amy Klein

November 10, 2003 Monday

"Why are you single?" I'm standing with a glass of champagne at a baby shower when another woman -- whom I'd only met at the bridal shower and wedding -- hurls this accusation at me shortly after we say hello in that sweetly phony way that only two strangers can muster.

She probably means it not as an invasion of privacy but as a compliment: How could someone as ----- as me not have a husband? She's tilting her head and smiling flirtatiously, and asks me the question that many family members would die to know the answer to but are too afraid to ask:

"So, why are you single?" she says again, actually waiting for an answer.

I bite my tongue on a snappy comeback ("Why are you married?"), and in the name of not causing a catfight at a baby shower, I smile politely and say, "I just haven't met the right guy."

If only I had read Rachel Greenwald's new best-seller, *Find a Husband After 35 Using What I Learned at Harvard Business School* (Ballantine Books), I could have told this woman what Greenwald writes in the opening of her 311-page book: "Why are you still single? It doesn't matter."

What matters, Greenwald writes, is what you are going to do about it.

A Harvard M.B.A. who worked as a marketing executive at companies like Evian, Greenwald proposes that women devote the next 12 to 18 months of their lives to her "Simple 15-Step Action Program" and market themselves down the aisle. This "Program" -- the latest but certainly not the last tome on husband hunting -- requires you to package, brand and advertise yourself, as well as conduct market research, employ event planning and perform quarterly reviews to your dating life, just as any successful company would create, plan and launch a new product into the marketplace (see related article). No. 7 on the New York Times best-seller list, with press from *People* to the "Today" show and a movie development deal from Paramount,

Finding a Husband is a perfect gimmick for the new millennium, where everything from religion to education to politics comes down to good marketing.

Greenwald frames her arguments in simplified business models, and argues her case that the single woman as a low-demand product in an increasingly competitive world. It's a world with 28 million single women over the age of 35 in the United States, compared to 18 million men of the same age.

And you have to make yourself stand out.

"Dear -----," you are supposed to write to everyone you know. "Are you still enjoying your new job? It sounds wonderful! I have a special favor to ask you. This year, I would like to find someone special to spend my life with. Do you know any single men you could introduce me to? I would truly appreciate your help!"

By this point -- after your mass marketing, telemarketing, guerrilla marketing campaigns -- if you aren't so completely mortified by this panhandling that you can actually leave your house, you have to actually go out with everyone available. The point is to "cast a wider net," which, Greenwald says, is the biggest problem for women over 35. By putting yourself out there as prominently as the Golden Arches, you are supposed to increase your odds of meeting "someone wonderful" -- not to mention of meeting "someone horrible" as well.

As any woman in the "meet" market has asked herself -- or as "Sex and the City's" Carrie might ponder: "Sometimes I wonder, 'Is dating simply a numbers game?'"

If you go out with 100 guys, are you more likely to meet someone than if you go out with 10? Certainly, in the business world, those figures seem likely. But the capricious world of romance isn't quite as linear. I have been out on about 100 blind (Internet) dates, yet I'm dating the first guy I was randomly introduced to at a party last month.

Tell me this: Must I abandon my carefully constructed life -- the career, the traveling, the sports, the free-lancing, the parties, the friends, the fun -- just to find a husband?

Greenwald thinks so. "You've tried that all before and it hasn't worked," she says. And the recent pro-mommy media blitzkrieg (which I think is secretly sponsored by my parents) seems to show Greenwald is right. The New York Times Magazine's Oct. 26 cover featured "The Opt-Out Revolution," about Ivy-League, Type-A women who stepped off the corporate ladder for motherhood. And Time magazine recently weighed in with a cover on the epidemic of childlessness due to devotion to careers, based on Sylvia Ann Hewlett's *Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children*. Almost everywhere I turn, it seems like the feminism I took for granted -- the one that said I could be anything I wanted to be, and I could have a career and a family -- is being turned on its head. So maybe Greenwald is right. Forget living; start dating. Shortly after I read *Finding a Husband*, I find myself in an alternate universe where the world is a stage and I'm on it. I find myself inhabited by strange Greenwald-like thoughts such as, "Is that guy who is throwing onions into his supermarket cart single?" Or "Maybe my mailman really is an intellectual, you never know."

I imagine what would happen to me if I were to follow "The Program" for the next year and a half: Everything I do would be geared to the pursuit of a man, from my morning coffee (go to a

Starbucks where you might meet a cute guy), to my extracurricular education (take a carpentry class instead of poetry). All my friends, family and colleagues would be involved on my crusade, and even my career would be up for review if it were getting in the way of my full-time job of dating.

And then I snap back to reality. Have you ever been on more than two dates in a week? The endless string of coffee dates with strangers takes its toll on the soul. Suddenly there's nothing to talk about because all the things that make you you -- your law job, your hiking craze, your secret science-fiction obsession -- are all gone, replaced by a desperate, man-hungry monster. "ME WANT HUSBAND! GIVE ME HUSBAND NOW!"

While many a lonely older woman wants a husband badly enough to join the program proscribed in Finding a Husband After 35, there are still a few of us out there who believe that the only way to find your soul mate is to find -- and love -- yourself.

So the next time I'm standing alone at a baby shower (won't God save me from these wasted Sunday fetes?) and some yenta asks me, "Why are you single?" I'm going to slide my lip into a mischievous grin, raise an eyebrow and my champagne glass in a toast to my fine life, and say, "Why not?"

COUNTRY: UNITED STATES (79%);

GEOGRAPHIC: AMERICA (58%);

SUBJECT: Lifestyles; Marriage; Dating; Relationships; Single;; HUMAN INTEREST; LIFESTYLES WOMEN (78%); MARRIAGE (77%); MEN (74%); BOOK REVIEWS (72%); WRITERS & WRITING (70%); NEW PRODUCTS (67%); MARKET RESEARCH (64%);

LOAD-DATE: November 11, 2003

LANGUAGE: English

GRAPHIC: Kim Cattrall, known for her role as "Sex in the City's" "single & loving it" Samantha Jones, will appear on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" today.

Copyright 2003 Chicago Sun-Times, Inc.